



October 22, 2007

O 009

Dan Leavitt
Deputy Director
California High-Speed Rail Authority
925 L Street Suite 1425
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Draft Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train (HST) Program EIR/EIS

Dear Mr. Leavitt:

The California Outdoor Heritage Alliance (COHA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting wildlife conservation and protecting our hunting heritage, strongly opposes the high-speed rail alignment and station location alternative that connects the Bay Area with the Central Valley via the Pacheco Pass traveling through Los Banos and the Grasslands Ecological Area.

O009-1

The Pacheco Pass route would unnecessarily threaten 180,000 acres of vital wetlands and uplands in the Grasslands Ecological Area. This route would be harmful to wintering waterfowl as well as many endangered and threatened species, since 60 percent of the Pacific Flyway's waterfowl use the Grasslands during their annual migration. Additionally, this rail alignment alternative would further fragment the Grasslands Ecological Area – the largest, contiguous wetland complex that still remains in California – and take away from the tremendous investment of public taxpayer dollars already spent to preserve and protect this important area.

COHA believes that the most appropriate way to connect the Bay Area with the Central Valley is the high-speed rail alignment route over the Altamont Pass and through Modesto. This alternative would have significantly less environmental impact and construction costs would be comparable to the Pacheco Pass route. In addition, the San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council, which includes representatives from across the Valley, endorses the Altamont Pass route because it would serve more San Joaquin Valley population centers, including Modesto and Stockton.

O009-2

The creation of a high-speed rail system is important to the economy of California. However, the High-Speed Rail Authority must take steps to protect the state's most important wildlife habitat. The Pacheco Pass alternative route does little to ensure the protection of vital wetlands and uplands, and therefore COHA is strongly opposed to it.

O009-3

Sincerely,

Jason Rhine
Director of Advocacy